Kamala Woods

Honors English A3

Living History project

A Nameless Sacrifice

*“Caker! Caker,” I tug the boy's shoulder.*

*“Pacach! I do what I want,” he giggles, throwing the small stones at the goats.*

*“It is disrespectful to Adonai! Aba says the herd is the core of the tribe, and our source of life! If you don't show respect to the herd, then Adonai will be mad and...and we will all die! Don't be so nabal,” I whine.*

*“You don't know anything, silly girl. You're just an olal, a child! I am older than you, Nogah,” Boaz puffs out his chest.*

*“You are only a year older than me Boaz, and I'll be eight soon too! Nabat, I'm almost as tall as you anyways!” I wobble on my tiptoes.*

*He picks up another pebble from the dusty floor, and I grab it from his hand. “Cacker! Go find something else to do, Boaz! You are bothering the goats, and I have to look after them today, so now you are bothering me too!”*

*Boaz rolls his eyes, sighing, “Ah, Nogah, you are no fun! You are too serious.” He drops his handful of pebbles and stomps away, exasperating,"Always so bossy!”*

*Bending down I pick them up, muttering, “That rascal. He won't throw rocks at the herd if he can't find any.”*

*I stand up, feeling the weight of the pebbles in my girdle. My eyelashes catch the harsh sunlight as I hike up to where our herd grazes. Laying down I pick up one of the lambs. It bleats. I place it in my lap, fingering its fur. It is smaller than the others.*

*“Do you remember being born, little lamb? I remember. Aba told me I could raise you and name you. You would be my companion, and that you would belong to me, just me, not the Tribe. However, I am having trouble giving you a name. It has to be special. A name that fits you well, but I don't know what that it is. What name would you like?” I whisper.*

*She doesn't reply, but I don't expect her to. Instead, I close my eyes and enjoy the silence.*

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Abruptly, I wake up. The memory fades. It takes some time for my eyes to adjust to the darkness, but eventually I see the outline of Yael and the door in front of us.

Yael sits up, “Nogah, are you alright?” Her voice breaks. Its due to a lack of water, I realize.

“Ken,” I sigh.

She hesitates, “Did you get any sleep?”

“Lo.”

“I didn't either. It's too hard without seeing the stars. I worry the roof will fall on us.”

“Yael, how long do we have to stay here in Babylon as slaves? When can we go back to the desert, and live as nomads again?” I ask reluctantly.

“Until the building projects are over, and our labor isn't needed anymore. Then we can go back.”

“How long will that be?”

“Lo yodea.”

“Well, at least I get to look after our master's goats, just like I did with the Tribe. I like looking after the goats, especially the lambs, but I wonder where they all go. I look after them, and raise them, and I have even given some of them names. But, one by one they all disappear. If I knew Akkadian, I would ask our master. Where do you think they all go, Yael?”

“Lo yodea.”

“I hope they go somewhere nice. I hope the Tribe's herd is doing okay too, after we got captured by the Babylonian slave guards and taken here. Do you think the herd is okay?”

“Lo yodea, Nogah.”

“ Our Tribe will be reunited, right? And we will all be happy again, ken?”

“Ken,” she coos, but I can tell in her voice that she is lying.

“And Aba will be there?”

“Nogah,” she sighs. I don't know why I keep asking her; Aba is never coming back.

I change the subject, “Yael, can we go over the Akkadian words you taught me?”

“Nogah, it's the middle of the night. We will have to be getting up soon, and you will be tired.”

“I can't sleep anyways, so why don't you just help me learn a little? It is helpful to know a little of the Babylonian dialect, so I can talk with others.”

“What is there to talk about? They are barbarians, Nogah. We have nothing to say to them,” Yael snarls.

“Bevekshah?”

“I will tomorrow. Besides, Nogah, you talk way too much. Now, ani ayef. Lai la tov.”

“Besder. Can you tell me a story, then?”

“Lai la tov!”

“Lai la tov,” I repeat.

My Aba would always tell me stories when I asked him too. Always,

*“Aba, tell me a story,” I demand excitedly, “every story there is.”*

*“Impossible. There are more stories than there are stars in the sky,” he grins, lifting his hands upwards. I look up, smiling at the sky's familiarity and calmness.*

*“Then tell me my story, Aba.”*

*“You must do that for yourself, Nogah. No one can tell you your own story.”*

*“Why?” I fix my wide eyes on his face that is lined with age and patterned with sunburns marked by years of traveling, the sign of a true nomad.*

*“Well, you can't tell the desert its story. Instead, you listen to what it has to say. You observe the waves of the sand dunes, the bones left behind. You observe the migratory path of the desert larks, which way the sun rises, and the design rain makes when it washes with the sand.” My Aba walks along the desert with me by his side, his eyes center on the setting sun.*

*“What's the desert's story, then?” I entreat.*

*Aba chuckles, “What have you observed?”*

I drift off into the night's silence, comforted by memories of my Aba.

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“Izuzzu. Izuzzu! Su Umu!" The old Babylonian woman, Belit, softly shakes me. The fringed shawl thrown around her shoulders tickles my cheek.

“Izuzzu,” I nod, rubbing the grit out of my eyes.

“Up. Dawn here,” Belit speaks in broken Hebrew.

“Izuzzu,” I repeat, staring blankly at the calm, dark sky peeking behind the window.

I stand up from the small sleeping reed mat, draping my tattered halug over my inner garment. With my braided belt, I secure the tunic around my waist. Accompanied with Yael, we exit the slave quarters and enter the ground room, passing by the reception room, the small kitchen, and the lavatory. I make my way outside where the sun begins to rise. Opening the wooden gate to the goats' cage, I am greeted with bleats.

“Shalom, my little friends!” I squat down, scratching the smallest lamb behind her ears.

“Shalom, Adi, my little jewel! You remind me so much of the little lamb I had back home. She was small too, and white. But I didn't have the chance to name her. I don't think I would have named her Adi, though. I like that name, so don't worry about it, but I don't think it would have suited my little lamb. Actually, I still don't know what I would have named her, and that was a long, long time ago. Ah! Well, hello Kfir! I can spot you out anywhere because of the scratch behind your eye. I wonder how you got that. Anyways, do you know why Kfir is a funny name for a goat? Because it means lion cub!” I giggle, “and you are a goat! Don't you see why that is funny? Well, I think it is funny. You are not listening to me, Kfir. Well that's okay. I'll just talk to Ira. Hey, don't eat my kethoneth! I'll be bringing you food soon! Silly goat. You do have beautiful eyes, though. They are so big, they remind me of a huge pool of swampy water. That doesn't sound very pretty, swampy water, but I guess it could be.”

“Oh, and here is Levi, poor little Levi. I remember you because of your nose. It is the pinkest and softest one out of all the others. I could just pet it all day long. Your father disappeared, didn't he, little lamb? I don't know where he went. I tried to ask Yael to teach me some Akkadian, so I could ask my master, but she was too tired. You must be devastated though, huh Levi? I know how it goes,” I sigh, “I lost my father too, my Aba. I want him to come back, but I know he won't,” I trail on, “ He was shot down by the Babylonian soldiers when our Tribe was captured in the desert, in our own home. That was about a year ago, I think. I must be about nine years old now, right? I think so, since I was eight when our Tribe was taken away. I wonder how my other family members are all doing. I only talk with Yael now. Everyone else disappeared.”

Crouching on the ground, I couldn't help but to recall that moment when everything changed. The summer climate was blisteringly hot and everything was a wave chaos as the Babylonian soldiers rounded us up and stole us from the desert.

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*“Attanu ipa abdu! nakasu u mâtu! Izuzzu aallu! Izuzzu aallu,” they yell in an unfamiliar tongue.*

*“Aba,” I cry, my eyes sifting through the sea of bodies for my father, my Aba.*

*The foreign soldiers wrap rope made of goat hair around my wrists. Their rough, calloused hands throw me into a line made with my other nomadic Tribe members who are all weeping and shrieking with shock. Men ride in strange boxes with wheels attached to horses surround us, herding us like goats.*

*“Nogah! Nogah,” my Aba, scuttling towards me out of nowhere, wraps me into his arms. His turban is unraveling and it drapes down his shoulders.*

*He grabs my hand, pulling me behind him through the crowd of my people. Someone seizes my waist from behind, ripping me away from the shelter of my father.*

*“ABA!” I bleat, my heart fluttering painfully against my ribcage.*

*“NO! Nogah,” my Aba reaches down into his girdle, clutching a small, misshapen dagger with a leather handle.*

*The soldier throws me down onto the sand, reaching for his arrow. He strings his bow. The heat beats down, and there is a group of desert larks above my head. The soldier points the arrow in front of him. The larks pass over, heading for the horizon. The arrow is released. There isn't a cloud in the sky, just that deep, rich blueness. The sun begins to climb down, slowly, carefully, reluctantly. My Aba falls limp. His dagger drops into the red sand. His eyes are glazed and empty. Empty.*

“Abdu, izuzzu!” My master barks, marching over to where I sit.

The memory flees and my attention is brought back to reality. I freeze, gripped with fear. Timidly, I looked up at his formidable figure through my long eyelashes. He always wears an angry expression, and his breath and soiled clothes smells rancid. His greying beard, cut geometrically, is oiled and heavily perfumed, which only adds to his rank odor. The household I was sold to as a slave is not a rich household. I stare at my master while staying crouched on the ground next to the goats. How different he is compared to my Aba. If only Aba hadn't fallen, and our tribe hadn't been captured for slave labor, then I wouldn't have ever met this awful man.

I blink, standing up from where I crouched and looking down at my feet.

“Abdu,” He picks up a wooden stick, holding it threateningly over his head.

My eyes stay fixed on the ground; I don't dare look up. My master wheezes, as if every breath is a struggle. I hear the wooden stick clunk against the ground as he wobbles away. He walks towards the Babylonian slave boy Dir, a quiet and obedient child.

“Sarâku annû ū ina ekallum,” my master snarls, shoving the boy towards the wooden gate.

The boy opens the gate, clicking his tongue. Beckoning the animals out, he takes four of the strongest male goats and leads them away from the pen. Where is he taking them? This must be how they disappear all the time. If I find out where the goats go, then I can tell the little lambs where their friends are taken to! Ensuring that my master has walked away and the wooden gate is closed tightly, I follow the boy and the goats down the narrow city streets. Small adobes made of sun dried brick plastered with white paint looms on all sides as the Babylonian people walk past. I crane my neck around me, trying to identify where in Babylon I am. I spy far in the distance the wall, the Great Wall of Babylon that impends in the background. A wave of terror and nausea overtakes me. That wall will always be imprinted in my memory, since it was the first taste of civilization I had had when our Tribe was captured and deported to Babylon. While I follow loosely behind Dir, I am reminded when I first saw the wall.

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*It climbs hundreds and hundreds of feet, cold and unrelenting, so alien to the way of life I am used to. The walls are ornamented with colors and patterns I have never seen before. There are golden beasts with jeweled mains and white horns. They have red eyes, eyes that seem to scorch through me with hatred. The beasts are painted in tiles of a rich blue. Colossal bronze statues of bulls and dragons stand at the main entrance, sending an unsettling sense of foreboding down my back. They have scaly bodies, and each scale reflects the sun's light in such a way that it looks like a river of movement. The creatures have scorpion stingers on their tails, and lion legs. There is an inscription on top of the arched gate.*

*My head is flooded with strange smells and sounds as we pass through the Ishtar gate into the bustling city. The streets are narrow and cramped, as people clothed in burnished, vibrant robes and rich materials stop to stare at us. Is that fear in their eyes? Hatred?*

*“Yefet, why do they look at us like that?” I snivel, looking up at Yefet's dust streaked face.*

*“They don't understand us, Nogah, or our way of life. These people believe they know us because of the stories they hear.”*

*“What stories?”*

*“They hear that nomads are a barbaric people, that we eat meat raw and we don't bury our dead, or believe in a god.”*

*“Who is telling those stories, Yefet?”*

*“Ani lo yodéa. Stories are slippery things.”*

The memory fade as I see the boy halt at an extravagant temple decorated with rich blue tiles and paintings of white bulls. What is he doing here? One of the priests open the temple's doors and walks over to the boy. They converse quietly as the priest examines the four goats. He selects the sturdiest of them, exchanging the animal for a shekel of barley. Pleased, the boy gathers the remaining three goats and returns the way he came. Why did the priest choose only one? What is he going to do with it? I can probably pass as a temple slave, which would allow me to enter the temple and find out where the priest is going.

Slyly, I slip through the temple doors, spotting the priest's robes as he turns the corner. The temple is dead silent and smells of incense. Only the soft patter of my feet and the pleading of the goat can be heard. The priest walks deeper into the temple until he enters a room closed off by curtains. There are no windows, and the only light available comes from numerous candles spread throughout the room. A decadent altar stands in the center, lavishly filled with foods and other valuable items. Three other priests are gathered around the altar, praying to a giant image of a god. The main priest brings forth the lamb, placing it on the altar.

I hold my breath, slightly opening the curtains so that I can see what is happening. The priests burn incense and begin chanting. The alarmed goat begins to panic, kicking its feet and wailing pitifully. I wince, restricting myself from crying out. Time passes and my legs become stiff from standing for so long. Finally, one of the priests picks up a dagger. I breathe in sharply. What is that for?

“ Samu utappa girra innapu mû illaka ār ūt sūt Aruru ikru u kirissin akittu nap tu petâ pur du ap âtu mala baâ Marduk dull,” they prey, lifting their hands towards the image of their god.

“Samu utappa girra innapu.”

Their monotonous voices send shivers down my back.

“Mû illaka ār ūt.”

The goat kicks, and the elevated dagger eerily catches the candlelight.

“Sūt Aruru ikru kirissin.”

The dagger is forced into the vulnerable goat, who howls.

“Sakittu naptu petâ pur du.”

The animal's cry echoes desolately throughout the room, and the dagger is removed.

“Ap âtu mala baâ Marduk dull.”

Thick, dark ribbons of blood spill out across the altar, staining the priests' white robes. Everything is silent.

My mouth gapes open with horror. My eyes stay fixed on the limp creature sprawled out helplessly. Its eyes are empty. Empty. The scene painfully reminds me of the little lamb I held in my arms all those years ago back in my Tribe, the little lamb who died without a name.

*“Aba, my lamb died,” I choke, tears streaking my soft cheeks, “she was just a baby!”*

*“She had been sick for the past week. She was born very small. It was to be expected,” Aba replies softly, his eyebrows caving in slightly.*

*I look down at the lifeless body of the newborn barely wrapped in my sun bleached kethoneth.*

*“B-but why did she have to die? She was so little. She didn't do anything wrong.” With my shoulder I wipe the snot from my nose. Fresh tears trickle down my face, silently, inevitably.*

*“My bat, we all have our time. All of life is impermanent, it's the way of chai, of life. One day I will die, and you will die, and our body will go back to the desert, our home,” he smiled pitifully, correcting my disheveled hood, “no more tears. Death is as natural as birth, it is all connected. Look over here,” Aba walks over to the tent's entrance, opening up the woven pattern of goat hair and signaling me to stand beside him. He points across the distance, up to the sun, “Do you see the shemesh? Even it must die one day, even it must fall down, past the chug. Even the great shemesh will have the same fate as you, and me, and your little lamb. It is the way of the desert, it is our nathiyb, our path.”*

*“Ani lo yoda'at. I didn't even name her yet. She didn't even really live.” I mumble, clutching the cold body between my small arms, “what is the point, Aba, if we are born just to die one day, unfairly, all alone, without a story, without a family, without anything?”*

*“That is the question, isn't it?” My Aba gazes across the miles of sand. I wonder what he sees.*

*I break the silence, “Aba, promise me you won't fall like the shemesh.” I look up towards his towering figure, silent and sombre.*

*He walks out of the tent.*

The priests crouch on the ground, their hands raised towards their god. They stop praying, since the sacrifice is over. I walk away from the room, dazed. The incense burns my throat, and my vision is blurred with tears. Everything is silent as I saunter down the main corridor towards the temple’s door. My movements feel slow and sluggish as I drift out through the doors and down the uneven roads of Babylon. The sun is low on the horizon, and night begins to settle. I feel completely numb, and for once I have nothing to say. I try to focus on the people walking past me, studying their faces, their clothes, their hair, anything to keep me from remembering that animal. Night falls as I approach my master's house. Silently, I slip through the door and into the slave quarters. I can hear Yael's breathing as she rests on her reed mat. I lay down, not caring to remove my halug and belt.

“Nogah? Is that you?”

I remain silent.

“Where on earth have you been? Do you know how much trouble you are going to be in tomorrow? Master is furious with you! You slacked off on all of your chores, which I had to make up for by the way. If you do that one more time, I will strangle you! You can't disappear for an entire day!” Yael spits, enraged.

I have no words.

”Nogah! Answer me when I talk to you! Where have you been?”

I sigh, resting my head on the mat and looking up towards the low ceiling.

“Nogah, did…..something happen? You have never been this quiet before,” her tone softens.

“The goats…..they,”

“Oh, Nogah,” she sighs with annoyance.

“They are sacrificed to a statue. I don't even know who the statue is of. It was probably a god, and he four huge eyes and four huge ears. He frightened me, and I don’t even know him. All I know is that the poor goat died all alone, and the statue didn't even notice.”

“Well, how is that any different from what we did back in the tribe? We killed the goats too.”

“No, we didn't *kill* them, not like that. They died so we could live, since the only source of food we really had came from our herd. They were the core of our tribe, as Aba would always tell me, and we respected them. Above all, we respected them. Our Tribe knew how important and sacred a single goat’s life was. But the priests in the temple kill the goats for no reason. In the temple, they are slaughtered, sacrificed for something that doesn’t mean anything. They aren’t respected, and each life isn’t seen as sacred. Instead, it’s used to please a frightening statue.”

“That's just how it is. We live in a different time now, Nogah. We live in civilization, and civilization is barbaric.”

“I wish I didn't have to be a part of it. I wish I could go home with Aba where everything makes sense.”

“I know, Nogah. I know,” Yael whispers gently.

Silence follows, since I have nothing left to say. Together, Yael and I drift off to sleep.

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Attribution of Research

1. "Ancient Babylonia - Houses and Farms." *Ancient Babylonia - Houses and Farms*.

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* The ground floor of an average Babylonian house consisted of the reception room, the lavatory, and the kitchen
* The city streets were narrow and uneven
* Reed mats decorated the houses
* Houses were made of sun-dried brick
* Houses were painted with white plaster

2. "ANCIENT CLOTHES,HOUSES:Fabrics, Design, Their Tents and Village Houses with

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* The halug, or tunic, was commonly worn in ancient Hebrew dress

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* The Babylonians spoke Akkadian

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* Armies used the horse-drawn chariot
* Mobile armies were equipped with bows and arrows

5. "Encyclopedia of Money." *: Babylonian Grain and Silver Standard*. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.

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* Barley was used as currency
* The standard currency unit was a shekel, meaning 180 grams of barley or a fixed weight of silver

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* Marduk’s physical appearance (fur large eye and four large ears)

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* Babylonian people wore fringed shawls

7. Garnaut, Christine. "Babylon." World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras. ABC–CLIO, 2015.

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* The Great Wall of Babylon was made with sun-dried brick

8. "Hebrew Culture and Lifestyle." *Hebrew Culture and Lifestyle*. N.p., n.d. Web. 08

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* The herd is the main supporter for the Tribe, since it is the herd that provides food, hair (for clothing, bags, etc.)
* Ancient hebrew dress consists of the inner garment, the outer garment, and the girdle (a belt to keep the outer garment in place.)
* Nomadic Tribe members often carried knives for defense
* The most commonly worn article of Hebrew clothing was the kethoneth, which comes from the word ‘to cover.’
* The nomadic Tribe’s tent was made of goat hair

9. Hutchinson, Jennifer. "Walls of Babylon." World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras.

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* The Ishtar Gate was painted with a rich blue glaze
* Bulls and dragons were painted in the Ishtar Gate’s tiles
* Colossal bronze statues of of bulls and dragons stood at the entrance of the gate
* The dragons had scaly bodies and heads with lion legs and scorpion stingers on their tails
* There was an inscription on the top of the Ishtar Gate
* The Ishtar Gate was arched

10. "Lamb, Mutton, and Goat in the Babylonian Temple Economy." *Lamb, Mutton, and Goat in the*

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* Babylonian priests sacrificed sheep, goats, and lambs to their patron deity
* Only the strongest male goats were sacrificed
* Temple outsiders raised and prepared the goats for sacrifice

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* Akkadian incantation prayer to Marduk, the Babylonian patron God

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<<http://factsanddetails.com/world/cat56/sub363/item1521.html>>.

* Mesopotamian men had long beards that were cut geometrically, oiled, and perfumed

13. Nemet–Nejat, Karen Rhea. Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia. N.p.: Library of Congress,

19998.Print.<https://books.google.com/books?id=lbmXsaTGNKUC&pg=PA112&lpg=PA112&dq=nomadic+mesopotamia+tribes&source=bl&ots=dt1L4mHUno&sig=NiDpPDCt0XssAEVVilgLGu7l8PI&hl=en&sa=X&ei=OfXWVOCsKZL3oAT33oCwAw&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=nomadic mesopotamia tribes&f=false>.

* Civilized people viewed desert nomads as barbaric people
* Stories circulated that the nomads ate meat raw, didn’t bury their dead, or know how to worship a god.
* Nomadic people were shepherds who owned and took care of a herd of goats, sheep, etc.
* Nomadic people belonged to and migrated with a tribe

14. "Slavery in Babylonia." *ILIL ARBEL*. Web. 19 Mar. 2015.

<<http://ililarbel.weebly.com/the-golden-rule-the-life-of-hillel-the-elder/slavery-in-babylonia>>.

* Some slaves were brought from other countries as spoils of war
* People were sold into slavery, and the master could sell his slaves is he wished

15. Sarna, Jonathan D., and Jonathan B. Krasner. *A History of the Jewish People*.

Springfield: Behrman Housen, 2006. Print.

* When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and brought the Jews to Babylon, he destroyed a way of life
  + The same goes when Nebuchadnezzar’s forces conquered Nogah’s nomadic tribe. Their way of life was also destroyed when they were taken from their home and deported to Babylon.

16. "Water in Israel: Overview of Middle East Water Resources." Overview of Middle East Water

Resources. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/water2.html>>.

* The climate during the summer in the desert was hot

17. Waerzeggers, Caroline. "Babylonian Priesthood in the Long Sixth Century BC."*Academia.edu*.

Web.<<http://www.academia.edu/1264059/The_Babylonian_Priesthood_in_the_Long_Sixth_Century_BC_BICS_54_2_2011_59-70>>.

* At the heart of the temple is a room that displays a huge image of the patron deity
* This room is closed off by curtains
* An altar was prepared for the deity and was filled with valuable items and food